

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:1-3).

Do you know God? Do you know Jesus Christ, whom God the Father sent into the world? Have you received eternal life? These crucial topics were on the heart and mind of the Lord Jesus Christ shortly before He went to the cross, where He would suffer the penalty for sin and bear the punishment of His Father. In Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to John, the apostle records Jesus' prayer to the Father shortly before He was taken prisoner. The hour had come! Soon, a cry from the cross, “It is finished,” would be heard! The eternal purposes of God to become incarnate, taking on Himself the nature of man and giving Himself as a ransom for many while maintaining His deity, would soon be fulfilled.

While Jesus does not provide a complete definition of eternal life, He tells us that it involves knowing the only true God and the Savior sent into the world. The Lord Jesus does not imply that eternal life is merely about understanding God the Father and the Son. Far too many people in this world know a great deal about religion and Christian theology, yet they remain spiritually blind to eternal life in Christ Jesus. The commentator William Hendricksen offers ample clarification. He writes, “To know the Father and Jesus Christ (for he is the only way to the Father), is not merely abstract knowledge, but a joyful acknowledgment of his sovereignty, glad acceptance of his love, and intimate fellowship with his person (through Scripture, that is, through his Word to us; and through prayer, that is through our word to him).¹” When Scripture uses the word know, it signifies more than intellectual knowledge. Genesis 4:1 helps us understand the biblical concept of knowing someone: Adam **knew** his wife, Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.” Clearly, this understanding involves much more than just head knowledge! There is a personal relationship in which one grows in love, knowledge, and fellowship. Since this is the case, let me ask again: Do you know God? Do you know Jesus Christ? What does the Lord Jesus mean in his prayer to the Father when he prays, “They **know** you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have

¹ William Hendrikson, *Gospel of John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 350.

sent”? (John 17:3). Please join me as we reflect on this crucial question, which concerns matters of spiritual life and spiritual death!

The vital question for all mankind is whether they can move from merely knowing about Jesus to knowing Him personally as Lord and Savior. First, we must recognize that God's sovereign will accomplishes a sinner's salvation. Although this idea contradicts the way most people think, it is not the good works of a person that save them! It is not merely living a good life that qualifies one for heaven! One cannot read the Word of God and arrive at any other conclusion than that. Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus likened a person's salvation to being “born again.” Just as we have no control over our birth, mankind also lacks the power within themselves to save themselves from sin. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, states it this way: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And ***this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works***, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10). Scripture verses highlighting God's sovereign work in a person's salvation are reiterated throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In the prayer of Christ², as recorded in John 17, we are told that Jesus has all authority to give eternal life (salvation) to all people whom God the Father gave to God the Son before the foundation of the world. This is how we must understand: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ***since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him***.”³ In Christian theology, there is a concept referred to as the “order of salvation.” This is a framework within theology that outlines a logical sequence of events by which God applies the benefits of Christ's redemption to His people. We will refer only to the first event; however, the complete list is provided below for informational purposes and, God willing, will be addressed in future writings. In Reformed theology, this list is known as the order of salvation:

- 1) Election refers to God's choice of people to be saved.
- 2) The gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel).
- 3) Regeneration (being born again).

² Traditionally known as the High Priestly Prayer

³ Bold and Italics added

- 4) Conversion (faith and repentance).
- 5) Justification (right legal standing).
- 6) Adoption (membership in God's family).
- 7) Sanctification (proper conduct of life).
- 8) Perseverance (remaining a Christian).
- 9) Death (going to be with Christ).
- 10) Glorification (receiving a resurrection body).

L. Berkhof, in his book *Systematic Theology*, defines the Doctrine of Election as follows: "Election is the eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation."⁴ Unfortunately, many have struggled with this biblical truth over the centuries. It is particularly sad when we consider that this sovereign work of God the Father, in giving His chosen people to God the Son, is meant to assure believers of their salvation. In John 6, Jesus repeatedly applies this marvelous truth to those He is ministering to: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:37-40). Once again, the exact words the Lord Jesus used in the high-priestly prayer in John 17 are echoed here in John 6: "***All that the Father gives me will come to me...***" Lest it be thought of only as something the Apostle John taught, listen to the Word of God from the letter to the church in Ephesus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he ***chose us in him before the foundation of the world***, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." What a glorious truth for the believer! If you are a Christian, before the foundations of time, the sovereign King of the universe loved you and appointed your salvation! If you have been made alive in Christ, it is absolutely impossible for you not to be with Him for all eternity!

⁴ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941) 114

Dear reader, we are addressing the sovereignty of the Almighty and eternal God! This is a lofty topic. Is it any wonder that we cannot understand everything? We must be content to praise God despite our limited understanding. Like so many who do not understand teaching on this subject, do not let human pride or the evil one convince you that these truths are invalid simply because we cannot fully comprehend them! I believe it was one of the early Church fathers who once said, "When faith and reason fail us, let us bow down and worship!" Embrace what Scripture teaches us and bow down to worship our great God! A brief biblical definition of God's sovereignty can be helpful. Using the words of the author A.W. Pink in his classic work entitled *The Sovereignty of God*, Pink writes, "What do we mean by this expression? We refer to the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, and the Godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High. He acts according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35)."⁵ This is precisely the thought of the Psalmist when he writes, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." (Psalm 115:3). In the Apostle Paul's closing words to Timothy in his first letter, regarding the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, he writes, "he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

At least in Western society, which is the only one I am familiar with, many people have a limited understanding of the God who has revealed Himself in His Word. Some years ago, I discovered a book titled *Your God Is Too Small* by J.B. Phillips. With such an intriguing title, I decided to purchase a copy. A central theme of the book is the need to recognize and experience a God who is "big enough," active, present, and relevant in every aspect of life, not just confined to religious rituals or childhood beliefs. The author encourages readers to move beyond a "small" God who cannot address real-life challenges or inspire deep respect.

In political forums, as well as in the print and digital press and the entertainment realm, we often hear God's name used disrespectfully and irreverently. When used in such a manner, God is depicted contrary to His revelation to mankind. He is portrayed in ways that sow seeds of doubt regarding His goodness and grace. I believe this is one of the devil's primary schemes to

⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) 20

mislead people about their thoughts of God. This approach dates back to our first parents. Adam and Eve had their choice of fruit from all the trees in the garden, where God's goodness in providing all they needed was on full display. However, God tested them by commanding them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan's tactic was to instill doubts in Eve's mind about the goodness of her Creator. "Now the serpent was craftier than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1). To this day, Satan remains in the business of instilling doubt in people's minds about the goodness of God! This holds especially true when discussing the sovereignty of God and God's work of electing grace!

A.W. Tozer, in one of his profoundly insightful works entitled *The Knowledge of the Holy*, begins the book with a chapter titled "Why We Must Think Rightly About God." The book itself is Tozer's examination of the attributes of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. In the first sentence of chapter one, Tozer writes, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God."⁶ When we consider God's electing choice in the salvation of sinful man, the only proper response is to bow down and worship! As we do so, we must remember that God is the sovereign Creator and ruler of heaven and earth. God is under no obligation to save sinners; yet, in His infinite love and compassion for mankind, He does just that! God is not cold and distant from His creation! He is warm and inviting! This is demonstrated for the world to see by sending His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners! As the Apostle Paul states to Timothy, "This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them." (1 Timothy 1:15). We must never forget that if we want to know what God is like, we must look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed to us in Scripture. Why is that? The writer to the Hebrews provides us with the answer. Speaking of the Son of God, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the *exact imprint of his nature*, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

In man's fallen condition due to sin, we may never understand why one person inherits eternal life while another does not. What we know and believe, however, is that God is wise, loving, just, and full of compassion towards sinners. This is how God has revealed Himself, and

⁶ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Monee, IL: n.p. 2021) 4

as Tozer has stated, we must think rightly of God! The Covenant of Redemption,⁷ formed by the triune God before the worlds existed, is profoundly mysterious. Who could possibly fathom its depths! The Christian is not obligated to understand this work of God. However, it is a believer's obligation to spread the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and to pray for the lost! It is God's responsibility, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to awaken the elect sinner to their need for Christ.

In the 9th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses the subject of God's choice in election. His explanation is situated within the context of God's decision to establish the nation of Israel for Himself through the Old Testament figure of Abraham. Abraham's son Isaac had twin boys named Esau and Jacob. Even before the twins' birth, God's purpose was to choose Jacob as the bearer of the covenantal promises. Paul quotes from the book of Genesis when he writes, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." (Romans 9:13). Anticipating the criticism that might arise, Paul writes, "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So, then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." (Romans 9:14-16). The apostle continues this thought about the will of God, who raises up leaders of nations, with Pharaoh as an example, as He sees fit. The Scripture then states, "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me, then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"

Dear Reader, the fact that God determines who will inherit eternal life and who will be separated from God for all eternity should drive us to our knees in prayer! If we are in Christ, we should cry out to God for the salvation of those around us who have yet to come to the Savior! Contrary to some people's thoughts, the doctrine of election is a motivation to witness to others the Gospel of Jesus Christ! It is not, as some have said, reason to say in our hearts, "It makes no difference whether I witness or not, since God's will is going to be accomplished anyway!" This

⁷ L. Berkhof P. 271, "The covenant of redemption may be defined as the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him."

type of thinking is dead wrong! Christians are commanded by the Lord Jesus to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20). To those who have been born again in Jesus Christ, sharing the Gospel of God’s grace with others is a desire of their hearts. This is because the Holy Spirit is at work in the Christian, filling their hearts with love and compassion for sinners.

The good news of salvation is not just for the elect in Christ; it is for everyone without exception! Yes, thank God the elect will indeed respond to Christ, but the good news that Jesus died for sinners is for all! How else are we to understand these words in the Gospel of John? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:16-18). When the writers of the New Testament use the word “world,” the meaning we should derive from this is that God loves both Jews and Gentiles, and as a result, invites all to repent and believe in the Savior. Who is and who is not predestined to eternal life is not the Christian’s concern. We leave that to the Sovereign King of the universe!

Dear Reader, be wary of human pride! It is impossible to determine how many millions, or perhaps billions, of souls have died in their sins because of pride! Many reject the teachings on predestination and God’s electing grace because, in their heart of hearts, they believe they can earn the right to salvation through the lives they lead. This is human pride and is contrary to the humility mankind must have before their Creator and Redeemer. While we know that children can be mischievous and need discipline, there is something extraordinary about the humility of a young child. I believe this is why Jesus taught that those who receive the kingdom (those born again) must become like little children. In the Gospel according to Mark, we read, “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ And he took them in his arms and

blessed them, laying his hands on them” (Mark 10:13-16). This quality of humility was characteristic of the Lord Jesus during his time on earth. Writing to the church in Philippi, the Apostle Paul tells us, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” When we do not understand providence, and when we do not grasp a truth that the Scripture teaches repeatedly, how do we think? How do we act? Unfortunately, many have rejected the teaching of God’s electing grace and have argued against it. While understanding this truth does not determine your salvation, it is sad that a believer cannot humble their heart before the Lord and rejoice in the great gospel truth that the Father has given to the Son an innumerable number of souls who will be with Christ forever! Jesus spoke these words to his listeners, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” (John 6:37). Dear Reader, have you come to Jesus Christ? Are you one of his sheep? Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:14). I will end these thoughts as I started. Do you know the good Shepherd? If not, He invites you today, at this very moment, to come to Him for eternal life! May God cause all who read these words to hear the voice of Jesus Christ!